

Root Cause Analysis Template

Note on Use

Purpose

This tool is designed to help a project leader guide a team to uncover organization-specific root causes of a particular problem. A properly structured analysis reduces the risk of: solving a symptom of a problem rather than the root cause, over-focusing on one particular root cause, ignoring root causes, or misdiagnosing the relative weights of various causes.

For Use By

Initiative leader and team

Instructions

- 1 Craft a problem definition.** The most important part of a root cause analysis (RCA) is starting with a clear problem definition. A clear problem definition frames a problem without placing blame, assuming causality, or suggesting a solution.

Example of poorly-designed problem definitions that place blame and assume causality:

- How can the school improve its outdated service learning program to make it more impressive to university admissions offices?
- How can the school overcome resistance from parents who think mental health and mindfulness programming is a waste of time?

Example of well-designed problem definitions:

- Universities are not seeing the value of our current service learning program.
- The need for mental health and mindfulness programming is unclear to parents.

- 2 Use the accompanying template to start a root cause tree:** Place your tested problem definition in the top box of the RCA template and determine the problem's two immediate causes. The two causes should not overlap and should encompass all possible causes. To do this, project leaders should try to fill in the two blanks in the following sentence: This problem exists because of either [blank] or [blank].

- 3 Complete the root cause tree:** Repeat step two for the next level of the RCA. Continue the process until you have discovered all reasonable potential causes. The number of levels will vary depending on the problem definition.

- 4 Assign relative weights to causes:** Next, weigh each cause's contribution to the overall problem. To do this, go through each row, starting with the top, and assign percentages to each root cause based on that cause's contribution to the problem. The percentages across each row should sum to 100%. For some causes you may have hard data at hand—for others, you will have to rely on qualitative findings.

Current service learning offerings are insufficient

Current programming is insufficient

or

Current programming is sufficient, but transcripts do not show value

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